A University of Guelph researcher has found horses can sense when a rider is nervous and as a result will become nervous themselves.

Prof. Uta von Borstel, Department of Animal and Poultry Science, hooked up 53 pairs of riders and horses with heart monitors last summer at the International Student Riding Nations’ Cup in Innisfil, Ont., and measured their heart rates during stressful situations.

About 25 per cent of all fatal sports injuries are related to horseback riding, and about a quarter of all horse-related injuries are due to the horse being scared, said von Borstel, who’s been riding horses since she was a child.

“Horseback riding is one of the most dangerous sports you can do,” she said. “Studies show that your chances of getting injured riding a horse are far higher than while riding a motorcycle because the horse’s nerves can make it jump unpredictably. If we can do something to control horses and their reaction to fear, then we can reduce the number of accidents.”

She conducted her research as a PhD student with Prof. Ian Duncan and Anna Kate Shoveller in the Department of Animal and Poultry Science, Prof. Suzanne Millman in the Department of Population Medicine and Prof. Linda Keeling of the Swedish Agricultural University.

The heart rates of the riders and horses were used as an indicator of the level of fear they were experiencing during two fear-inducing tests.

For the first test, von Borstel told the riders she would be unexpectedly squirting the horses...continued on page 2
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A continuing demand by the general public for cheap eggs means that high hen density is a necessary component of egg production regardless of the production system employed.

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A pervading feeling of stress was noted for the riders, and the horses were likely stressed as well. The presence of the riders on the horses not only caused the riders to feel nervous, but also caused the horses to become nervous, as researchers have found that horses can become nervous when they are faced with a perceived threat. This leads to a cycle of stress and fear, which can become self-perpetuating. The horses in this study were not actually threatened, but the presence of the riders and the unfamiliar environment caused the horses to become nervous.

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A Closer Look at Poultry Transport Emergencies
By Kimberly Sheppard

Traffic accidents are a daily occurrence on roadways worldwide — one simply needs to watch the evening news to see the evidence. Although transport trucks are involved in less than 3% of all accidents on the road, a proportion of these accidents involve trucks carrying livestock — including poultry.

Brian Herman, President of Brian’s Poultry Services Ltd., has certainly seen his fair share. With a network of catching crews across the country, Herman is often one of the first to arrive on the scene when a truck accident occurs. “You get a call that a truck has overturned, do like a 32-point turn, “ says Herman. “That is looking for a good story or juicy quote, so human safety should come first, bird welfare second, and communications last. The media is looking for a good story or juicy quote, so it is advisable to have one person designated to handle all media inquiries. If the scene is too busy, refer them to OFAC or someone else, or offer to follow-up with them after the clean up. OFAC also offers training programs and resources to help. Ensuring that those involved are well prepared for future poultry transport emergencies will lead to a well-coordinated effort, and in turn, improved bird welfare."

For more information, please visit www.OFAC.org

This article was originally published in Canadian Poultry Magazine — www.canadianpoultrymag.com

Crates of live chickens are carried to the roadside after a truck has overturned

The CFIA will also ensure that government regulations are adhered to — “the Health of Animals Regulations Part XII prohibits the transportation of animals until to travel. Poultry stressers that it is not the intent of the CFIA to examine every bird, which is time consuming and could compromise the welfare of the all the birds, especially in cases of extreme weather. “Our intent is to examine the crates that have been severely damaged and to make sure that the birds that did survive the impact are suitable to be transported to a (designated slaughter facility),” says Patterson. “We have to stay within our guidelines that an animal has to be fit to be transported, otherwise you do the humane thing and you euthanize on site. But we’re usually not talking great numbers.”

The reason we’re not talking great numbers is due to a positive design element of the trucks — they have a superstructure that tends to hold the load. In “Tightly,” says Herman, “they’re lying on their side in real good condition. The problem is they’re smothering.” This is because the chickens are now piled on top of one another within the crate. For this reason, the catching crew needs to get the crates off the truck and righted on the side of the road as quickly as possible.

This can prove logistical nightmare, since each crate is upwards of fifty pounds, and often needs to be carried out of a ditch or up an embankment, sometimes in bad weather. Since this is extremely hard work, it is important to keep the morale of the catching crew high. “Buy them some coffee, buy them some donuts, show them that you care about them,” says Herman, “and do not be stingy with the money.”

Finally, a poultry truck is involved in an accident in a highly visible area such as a 400-series highway, an impediment to a speedy clean up can be the on-lookers and those trying to help. Let the police take the lead in directing people away, and ensure them that there are trained experts on the scene. One suggestion that arose at the discussion forum was the use of a tarp that could be set up to keep the accident, or at least an area for inspection and triage of potentially injured birds, from public view. This idea needs to be further developed to make it possible in a variety of situations.

The media may also show up; Crack MacKay, Executive Director of OFAC, presented some tips on dealing with the media. She said that human safety should come first, bird welfare second, and communications last. The media is looking for a good story or juicy quote, so it is advisable to have one person designated to handle all media inquiries. If the scene is too busy, refer them to OFAC or someone else, or offer to follow-up with them after the clean up. OFAC also offers training programs and resources to help. Ensuring that those involved are well prepared for future poultry transport emergencies will lead to a well-coordinated effort, and in turn, improved bird welfare.

Depend on the nature of the accident, some birds may be suffocating, severely injured, or dead. Depending on the nature of the accident, some birds may be suffocating, severely injured, or dead. Depending on the nature of the accident, some birds may be suffocating, severely injured, or dead. Depending on the nature of the accident, some birds may be suffocating, severely injured, or dead. Depending on the nature of the accident, some birds may be suffocating, severely injured, or dead. Depending on the nature of the accident, some birds may be suffocating, severely injured, or dead.
Spotlight on Faculty: Dr. Pat Turner

By Laura Dixon

Dr. Pat Turner has had a longstanding interest in the care and well-being of laboratory animals. As an associate professor in the Ontario Veterinary College’s department of Pathobiology, much of her current research is aimed at understanding the mouse as a research model, as well as conducting studies to refine the care and use of research animals. As Program Leader for graduate studies in Laboratory Animal Science, she teaches laboratory animal medicine and pathology to graduate veterinarians and veterinary students. She completed her DVM degree at Guelph and practiced as a mixed animal vet in Seaforth, Ontario for two years before returning to specialize in laboratory animal medicine and pathology, via the DVS program. Her DVS research involved an industry-sponsored project in toxicologic pathology. Time spent as Director of Animal Care Services and Assistant Professor of Pathology at Queen’s University and an industry position in toxicology evaluating drug safety solidified her interests in comparative medicine and pathology, and also demonstrated the need for more knowledge and expertise in laboratory animal behaviour and welfare. “Research groups working in science want to optimize the care of the animals that they work with; however, there just isn’t a lot of data available to develop solid practices and guidelines for housing and husbandry, particularly for rodents,” she says.

Through her work at the University of Guelph, Dr. Turner has been able to continue with mouse modeling research but has also developed research interests in laboratory animal behaviour and welfare. One of her favourite research subjects is the rat, a commonly used laboratory species. She has paired up with Dr. Francesco Leri in the Department of Psychology to collaborate on rat behavioural work. Says Turner, “With laboratory mice, it’s often relatively straightforward to tell when housing conditions are suboptimal, as mice will barber each other (chew each other’s hair) and may begin to develop abnormal behavioural patterns, such as repeated cage circling or jumping that can be readily seen. However, rats rarely show obvious abnormal behaviour unless environmental conditions are really extreme, regardless of the environment they are kept in. Rather, they seem to be programmed to adapt to almost any environment.”

So, does this mean the rat’s welfare is okay when they are housed under standard laboratory conditions? “We really don’t know. For example, current guidelines for housing rat colonies in both Canada and the US suggest that floor area for rats be approximately 2.5 times that of mice, despite the fact that a rat can be 25 times the size of a mouse.” This is a topic that hasn’t received much attention and Dr. Turner has focused research on this question. Because abnormal behaviour can be difficult to detect, her studies have evaluated both noninvasive physiologic stress of body weight, food consumption, fecal corticosterone levels and behaviour of rats which are visibly stressed, to determine whether different housing environments make a difference to rats. For example, it is becoming clear that the physiology of lab rats, whether they are paired or single housed, alters once they come into a research facility, such that the animal’s normal day/night variation in corticosterone output becomes markedly changed with time. Whether this also indicates an altered mental state, such as depression, is unknown and is currently under investigation. Other recent work has suggested that singly-housed rats are slower to respond to a mild pain stimulus and that animals have a reduced effect in these animals compared with pair-housed rats. This research indicates that although rats don’t always show obvious signs of poor welfare, the way in which they are housed can still affect them in a potentially detrimental way. It also has implications for other research that uses lab rats, particularly if the study is several months or more in duration. The control or “normal” rat may change over time with the current method of housing. In addition to being a welfare issue, these findings are important because rats are commonly used as research models for other species, including humans, and researchers need to be able to accurately interpret their findings.

Aside from her research, Dr. Turner also educates veterinary students about the importance of lab animal welfare through teaching in the undergraduate and graduate level. She was recently named the inaugural recipient of the North American Animal Welfare Award, co-sponsored by the Humane Society of the United States and Procter & Gamble. Turner plans to use the award to further her refinement research and to develop education programs in lab animal medicine for veterinary students. “With students interested in cancer, “ says Coomber, who has studied tumour biology at Guelph for more than 15 years.

She says companion animals offer benefits beyond conventional rodent models. Many of the same conditions of cancer affect both people and pets — especially dogs — in similar ways, including disease development and spread. “These similarities make them a very good model for human disease,” she says.

More important, pets arriving at the OVC hospital for diagnosis or treatment display actual clinical signs and disease progression. Real-life cases and conditions are often more useful than experimental animal models, in which scientists induce single genetic or chemical changes under artificial conditions, says Coomber.

While acknowledging the advances made by scientists and clinicians through studying rodents, she says: “I think a lot of cancer research has been lost in translation from mice to humans.”

The institute’s cancer care centre will provide diagnostics with advanced imaging and treatment involving surgery, radiation, chemotherapy and client counselling. Renovations to expand the OVC clinic and accommodate new equipment will be supported by a five-year, $10 million fundraising campaign now under way.

Most of that funding is expected to come through the OVC Pet Trust Fund, which earlier supported purchase of a radiation unit and an MRI for the teaching hospital. About one-third of visits to OVC’s small-animal clinic involve cancer referrals, says Woods. The new institute will help raise awareness of cancer in animals and improve prospects for patients and clients, he says. “If your cat or dog has cancer, it’s not a death sentence. There are things we can do.”

He recently undertook clinical trials on a melanoma vaccine for dogs based on gene therapy developed by cancer researchers at McMaster University. He’s now analyzing the results of that study.

“Melanoma in dogs is similar to melanoma in people,” says Woods, who last spring completed veterinary oncology board exams with the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine. “If we can show the therapy works well in dogs, it could transfer to people.”

Within the ICCI’s research network, investigators from OVC and across campus will study various aspects of cancer, including tumour biology, nutritional influences, drug interactions, palliative care and counselling, and ethics.

Scientists will also look at environmental aspects of cancer, using companion animals to study human and environmental health concerns and probably involving U of G’s recently established Centre for Public Health and Zoonoses. “Dogs can be useful watchdogs — they can be sentinel for cancer,” says Coomber. “You’re never able to predict where a solution will come from. Much of what we hope to learn will be relevant to any cancer.”

The Guelph researchers plan to work with other veterinary cancer clinics, allowing clinicians to share information and reducing the need to transport animals to OVC for clinical research. A number of private practices in Canada offer oncology services to clients. In the United States, similar animal cancer centres exist at Michigan State University, Colorado State University and Cornell.

This article was originally published in At Guelph.
Caring During Crisis: Animal Welfare During Pandemics and Natural Disasters

The symposium was unique because it was the first of its kind to focus on animals across species, borders and issues, and the format was highly interactive. – Dr. Suzanne Millman

The Animal Behaviour and Welfare Seminar Series hosted several great speakers over the past number of months, one of whom was Dr. Bill Muir, a geneticist from the University of Purdue. In his talk entitled “Multilevel selection in breeding programs: A win-win-win solution for the animal, producers and society,” he gave an overview of a breeding method developed by him and colleagues that has the potential to significantly reduce social stress and mortality in laying hens.

According to Dr. Muir, one of the problems inherent to intensive animal agriculture is the fact that housing animals alone causes welfare problems related to isolation, but housing these animals together in situations where they can’t escape from one another causes different welfare problems, such as aggression, injury, and stress.

When such an issue needs to be addressed, says Dr. Muir, in the mind of the geneticist the issue is either a management problem, or a problem of genetics. At the top of the list of problems associated with laying hens (one of Muir’s research species) is beak trimming – removal of a portion of the beak, causing acute and sometimes chronic pain. This is done to lower the incidence of injurious pecking. But Muir doesn’t feel that beak trimming is the solution for the animal, producers and society. He gave an overview of a breeding method developed by him and colleagues that has the potential to significantly reduce social stress and mortality in laying hens.

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Over the past 40 years or so, breeding companies have been working on developing laying hens for high production – basically by breeding high producing individual hens to brothers of other high producing hens. The problem with this, says Muir, is that placing all the emphasis on an individual animal totally ignores that fact that this animal isn’t an island by itself. The animal exists in a pen with other animals, and interacts. According to Dr. Muir, the highest producing animal is often at the top of the pecking order (the “bully”), and this animal is bred to other “bullies,” thereby perpetuating the problem. So, how can breeding programs improve this situation? One option is to identify undesirable behaviour and try to “breed it out.” This however is costly since it involves measuring behaviour traits of every single animal, and also results in diverted selection intensity, meaning selection for an individual trait causes selection pressure to be lost on another trait – namely production levels.

Therefore, Muir and colleagues have been working on developing a comprehensive solution – which they call multilevel selection, or group selection. Here, the group is selected for breeding rather than the individual, and the only unit measured is production – in this case how many eggs the group is producing. Muir and his research group performed some experiments whereby non-beak trimmed hens were kept in groups of four. If the hens in the group faired well together, were not stressed, were not experiencing high levels of mortality, and were therefore producing high numbers of eggs throughout the production cycle, they were selected for further breeding. Muir found that in the first generation, mortality levels were high – however, after 6 generations, mortality levels dropped to that of singly housed hens, or in other words, levels that would occur in the absence of social stress.

Group selection has implications that go beyond simply breeding for hens that are better suited to battery cages. It could work well to eliminate some of the behaviour problems that make going to alternative systems less than ideal, by selecting for less aggressiveness and feather-pecking in these systems, while giving the hens more freedom of movement. However the downside to group selection is the potential for inbreeding which, says Muir, becomes a problem after about five or six generations. To solve this, says Muir, breeding companies could alternate between individual selection and group selection, maintaining the most desirable traits along the way.

Genetics is one of many areas being investigated to mitigate welfare problems of production animals. Other areas include the study of behaviour, management, physiology, and neurology, all with the potential to work in tandem to develop not only better production systems, but strains of animals that are better suited for the systems being developed.

STUDENTS…

Where are they now?

Jennifer Gardner completed her Master of Science degree from the University of Guelph in 2000. Her thesis, titled “Investigations into the causation of bulb-nosing in early-weaned piglets”, was accomplished under the guidance of Dr. Tina Widowski in the Department of Animal and Poultry Science, University of Guelph.

Jennifer presented her research at a variety of conferences including an American Society of Animal Science meeting and International Society for Applied Ethology (ISAE) North-American regional meetings. As a recipient of the Humane Society of the United States graduate student travel award, Jennifer was able to present and discuss her research at what she considers her most memorable conference - the ISAE International Congress in Florianopolis, Brazil. Following her graduation, Jennifer pursued freelance scientific writing, and fulfilled contracts in the areas of animal welfare and animal health. She then took a short contract with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food’s Veterinary Sciences division working primarily with the Equine Specialist. There she largely assisted with a study investigating reproductive parameters in mares as they relate to equine pituitary toxicosis. She also had an opportunity to help develop methods for investigating the comfort of dairy cows housed in tie stalls. After the completion of her contract with OMAF, Jennifer accepted a joint position as Research Coordinator for the Poultry Industry Council and the Canadian Poultry Research Council. In 2003, Jennifer joined the Chicken Farmers of Canada (CFC) in Ottawa as their Animal Care and Research Coordinator. One of Jennifer’s primary responsibilities has been the development of an auditable Animal Care Program. This program, still under development, is designed to help demonstrate the level of care chickens receive on Canadian Farms. The program has been created with input from federal and provincial governments, academia, humane societies, farm animal councils, farmers, veterinarians and other industry stakeholders. It has also been piloted in most provinces. Jennifer will be continuing her work toward this initiative, with CFC’s goal of finalizing the program in 2007.

University of Guelph takes honours at 6th Annual Animal Welfare Judging Competition

Two teams from the University of Guelph took part in the 6th Annual Animal Welfare Judging Competition held in March, 2007 at Michigan State University (MSU). Seven Universities took part in the competition, with Guelph being the only Canadian team.

Teams were given various tasks, from designing welfare standards and that could be used by equestrian organizations for certifying stables and completing facility inspections, to making facility comparisons for beef cattle from calving to feedlot, dairy goats and rabbits. Guelph entered two teams in the Competition, Team A won the Overall Competition, while Team B came third. In the Team Assessment, Guelph Team A placed first, and Team B second. Guelph students also placed 4th, 5th and 6th individually. Congratulations to Head Coach, Dr. Ian Duncan and Animal Science students Tom Ferguson, Nadine Ringgenberg, Chantal Seguin, and Stephanie Seto who made up Team A, and Alesia Guthrie, Amy Verney and Rebecca White who made up Team B.

TWO MEMBERS OF TEAM A - From left to right: Stephanie Seto, Rebecca White, Chantal Seguin, Tom Ferguson, Nadine Ringgenberg, Amy Verney, Alesia Guthrie and Dr. Ian Duncan
Dr. Renée Bergeron recently joined Campus d’Alfred (U of G’s French-language campus) as Professor and Director. She previously held the position of professor of animal behaviour and welfare at Laval University. Bergeron has focused on effects of nutritional and environmental factors on behaviour and welfare of farm animals, as well as stress related to handling, transportation and pre-slaughter management, and its effects on welfare, physiology and meat quality.

MISSION STATEMENT
As a group of individuals with diverse interests and views, our primary goal is to promote the welfare of animals through research and education.

Editor and Communications and Outreach Coordinator: Kimberly Sheppard, ksheppar@uoguelph.ca

The Campbell Centre Welcomes New Faculty!

A warm welcome is extended to Dr. Renée Bergeron, Dr. Trevor DeVries, and Dr. Uta Von Borstel, all new faculty with the University of Guelph, and new CCSAW Associated Faculty.

Dr. Trevor DeVries completed his Ph.D. in 2006 in the Animal Welfare Program at UBC. He was a post-doctoral researcher with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada before being appointed as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Animal and Poultry Science at the University of Guelph, Kemptville Campus in 2007. His research interests include understanding the links between dairy cattle behaviour, nutrition and welfare. Much of his past research has focused on understanding how feeding management and feed area design influence feeding and social behaviour in dairy cattle. His current work includes understanding diet selection in dairy cattle, including the learning of this behaviour and ways to manage it to improve production, health, and welfare.

Dr. Uta Von Borstel has just accepted an assistant professorship in the Department of Animal and Poultry Science at the University of Guelph, Kemptville Campus. For her PhD, Von Borstel has been investigating the unconscious communication of fear between horses and riders with hopes that her work will help to reduce the number of accidents occurring with horses. Other research interests have included the effect of handling on semen quality in stallions, and outliers in dairy cow test day records. Besides her studies, she worked part-time in the Hannoverian Horse Breeding Association, in a large animal clinic, and has been involved in the training of young riding and racing horses.

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What does stereotypic behaviour look like?

If you’ve never seen a stereotypic behaviour being performed, you may want to check out this new website: www.aps.uoguelph.ca/~gmason/StereotypicAnimalBehaviour

The website, recently launched by Dr. Georgia Mason, Canada Research Chair in Animal Welfare at the University of Guelph, was designed to complement the 2nd edition of the book “Stereotypic Animal Behaviour: Fundamentals and Applications to Welfare.” Stereotypic behaviour is a repetitive, invariant behaviour with no obvious cause or function. Through the website you can view photos and video on a wide range of species performing stereotypic behaviour. The book, co-edited by Mason, focuses on the causation and treatment of environment-induced stereotypic behaviour, and considers the implications for animal welfare and normalcy of brain functioning.

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Dr. Trevor DeVries completed his Ph.D. in 2006 in the Animal Welfare Program at UBC. He was a post-doctoral researcher with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada before being appointed as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Animal and Poultry Science at the University of Guelph, Kemptville Campus in 2007. His research interests include understanding the links between dairy cattle behaviour, nutrition and welfare. Much of his past research has focused on understanding how feeding management and feed area design influence feeding and social behaviour in dairy cattle. His current work includes understanding diet selection in dairy cattle, including the learning of this behaviour and ways to manage it to improve production, health, and welfare.

Dr. Uta Von Borstel has just accepted an assistant professorship in the Department of Animal and Poultry Science at the University of Guelph, Kemptville Campus. For her PhD, Von Borstel has been investigating the unconscious communication of fear between horses and riders with hopes that her work will help to reduce the number of accidents occurring with horses. Other research interests have included the effect of handling on semen quality in stallions, and outliers in dairy cow test day records. Besides her studies, she worked part-time in the Hannoverian Horse Breeding Association, in a large animal clinic, and has been involved in the training of young riding and racing horses.

Dr. Renée Bergeron recently joined Campus d’Alfred (U of G’s French-language campus) as Professor and Director. She previously held the position of professor of animal behaviour and welfare at Laval University. Bergeron has focussed on effects of nutritional and environmental factors on behaviour and welfare of farm animals, as well as stress related to handling, transportation and pre-slaughter management, and its effects on welfare, physiology and meat quality.